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ABSTRACT

As an alternative to the traditional freshman composition course, a one-credit research skills module has been organized to help students develop competency in reference work and organization for research papers. Designed as part of a three-credit composition course, the eight week module concentrates on developing competency in the following skills: selecting and abstracting information from library books, periodicals, and general reference works; planning a research paper on a specific topic and resourcefully using library research scurces to find appropriate written material; writing up the findings of library research, using quotations and other references appropriately; and using standard documentation in footnotes and bibliography. (This paper includes a course outline for the eight week module and appendixes consisting of student guide sheets on the library, term papers, references and sources, and note cards.) (MAI)

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MODULAR APPROACH TO TEACHING RESEARCH IN FRESHMAN WRITING COURSES

Carol Lee Saffioti

It is increasingly difficult to meet the teaching demands made in the traditional freshman composition course. English faculties are expected to teach sophisticated reading, writing and analytic skills to students with widely varying academic preparation and to accomplish this in one or two semesters. The complexity increases with the addition of large numbers of non-traditional age college students with needs different from those of the student recently graduated from high school.

Add to such demands those for mature critical perceptions on the part of students, and for at least intermediate comptency in reporting, reference work and organization, and it is not a revelation to most English faculty when they conclude:

--that the traditional 3/3 credit system for first year "comp" is inadequate;

--that the freshman composition course is often ill-managed programmatically, with little administrative support;

--that freshman composition often unfair in its demands because it requires so broad a coverage of material within a severely limited time frame;

--that English faculty members, being subject specialists, are not always aware of the most recent general information sources most likely to be needed for freshman research projects.

Sharing the general problems and pressures facing English faculties across the country, the English faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, in consort with the instructional support staff of the library, has been experimenting with a one credit research skills module within the 3 credit freshman composition course. The modular approach was selected

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for its adaptability to size, content level, and teaching load requirements. In using the modular approach, the first task was to identify those skills necessary for introductory level research, and to offer training in those skills.

Though similar in content and purposes to a mini-course at CCNY, Parkside's model differs in 3 ways:[1]

1) As an 8 or 16 week module it gives the students time to develop skills, to produce, and to have much needed time for consultation.

2) The module is aimed at developing competency in research skills, one of three requirements of freshman in order that they continue their college careers.

3) The course is closely linked to work with librarians both in the classroom and in the library itself, with a workbook developed by the librarians as well as class exercises, and lectures from the faculty member.

Parkside's goal is to develop a workbook for research writing at the introductory level to parallel the workbook now in use for library skills.[2]

Basic Research Module

The following are two broadly defined research goals expected of all students:

1) The ability to use appropriate resources and services of a library to identify, select, and locate materials, both print and non-print, on a variety of subjects.

2) The ability to write a simple research paper at the level of quality and sophistication appropriate to entering college students.

Specifically, in the research paper module, competency consists of attaining the following skills:

1) The ability to select and abstract information from library books, periodicals, and general reference works.

2) The ability to plan a research paper on a specific topic.

3) Resourceful use of library research sources to find appropriate written material.

4) The ability to effectively select and evaluate of material to prove or demonstrate the thesis of the paper.

5) The ability to write up the findings of library research in a paper that (a) indicates logical and consistent order; (b) distinguishes the writer's ideas from ideas taken from library sources.

6) The ability to use quotations and other references so that they fit smoothly into the context.

7) The ability to use standard documentation in footnotes and bibliography.

The module is introduced to the students by the librarian and the instructor, both of whom require students to have conferences on a regular basis outside the class. The final evaluation of the work is based on completion of all assignments made by the librarian and the faculty member. At each step in the process, from formulation of topic to final draft, the students are directed by the instructor to seek advice from librarians; a librarian is also given time in class as well to answer questions, present information and ferret out problems with the faculty member.

The first assignment in the research module is designed to familiarize the students with library resources. At UW-Parkside, this is accomplished through a twelve chapter, self-paced Basic Library Skills Workbook. The purpose of the workbook is to familiarize the students with the university library and general library tools such as encyclopedias, periodical indexes, newspaper indexes, and biographical sources. A librarian assigned to each instructor administers this section of the course and students have two weeks in which to complete all assignments correctly. When corrections are necessary, the librarian acts as a tutor, explaining the mistake to the student and staying with the student until the correction is made. At the beginning of the third week, students turn in a preliminary research topic.

The instructor and the librarian then discuss each topic in light of the course requirements and available library resources. When the topics are approved, each student completes chapter 12 of the workbook (see Appendix A) which serves as a research guide helping students further refine their topics and develop a preliminary bibliography. A librarian examines each student's research so that students who have trouble locating sources can be led to alternative indexes or reference tools. The students have individual conferences with the librarian to be sure they understand where they are and what they still need to do.

Once the preliminary research is completed, students hand in to the English instructor a thesis statement, an outline for the paper and a bibliography. The requirements for the bibliography are discussed jointly by the instructor and librarian during an entire class period. Variety in types of sources and quality of sources are heavily emphasized as well as correct format (see Appendix B for sample exercises). Whenever seeking help from librarians the students must bring their work in order to make effective use of staff time in advising. At this stage, students complete the infomation gathering process and write a draft of the first five pages of their research paper. The instructor checks this draft primarily for footnote format and for the appropriate use of footnotes, although misspellings and other problems are generally noted to help the student. Students who are having difficulties are referred to the librarian, if necessary.

Course Outline--8 Week Module

Week I and II

Completion of exercises to familiarize the students with library resources and how to use them.

Week III

a. Preliminary topics due to English instructor for approval.

b. Review, approval, suggestions for revision made in consultation with the librarian; topics to be returned to students.

c. Preliminary topics used as basis for completion of Basic Library Skills Workbook chapter 12 (see Appendix A); librarian and staff to advise students with preliminary source checks.

d. Student consultation with instructor and librarian based on work completed in (c) should result in final term paper topic and thesis statement to be handed in to instructor for approval.

e. Return of final versions of topic and thesis statement to students.

f. In-class presentation and exercises on the selection and use of sources (see Appendix B).

Week IV

a. Development of outline for the paper.

b. Final outline due.

Week V

a. Student conferences with instructor. Referrals to librarian if necessary. The students should be aware before the week begins that their grade is equally dependent on performance in the library as well as classroom setting.

b. Students must present paper outline and proposed bibliography to the instructor for approval.

Week VI

a. Rough draft of first chapter or section (approximately 5 pages) due to librarian.

b. Student-instructor conferences.

Week VII

a. Lecture notes: how to conclude a paper.

b. Other exercises: how to use direct and indirect quotation.

Week VIII

a. Continued work on papers, in and out of class, with several joint teaching sessions, and problem solving sessions where students are able to ask questions in front of peers, in order to point out common and similar problems.

b. Papers due.

Personal styles and the needs of each group may vary, at critical points such as bibliographic, footnote processes and research methodology, exercises should be given which will alert students to their progress and standing in terms of mastering skills; the final grade should be determined by the instructor, after the librarian indicates whether or not the student's work is complete and satisfactory. Incomplete or unsatisfactory research is not accepted by the faculty member as fulfillment of the competency requirement in research skills.

Although at most colleges and universities the freshman composition course includes some instruction on writing research papers and several such courses include library instruction which is research related,[3] the research module offers a more flexible schedule:

1) As self-contained course taught for 1 or 2 credits.

2) As a unit taught within the context of the traditional freshman composition course.

Some of the advantages of the first format include the removal of the teaching of basic research techniques from the already overcrowded English composition syllabus; and the provision that students will earn the credit they deserve for the extended work required to master the skills needed to do basic research at the college level.

The latter format is possible for those curricula which cannot allow for externally scheduled modular teaching, while it still provides extended

and monitored coverage of the material. In either case, the English faculty member is assured that the expertise and cooperation of a professional librarian is available to students and faculty alike. Thus, the faculty member is relieved of the need to suddenly become an expert on references in everything from fluid dynamics to solar energy, and freed to attend very closely the structural, organizational, and stylistic problems that students will have with their papers. The proposed module is a way of meeting the challenge of the information explosion we all face in most areas of learning.

Other distinct advantages to teaching research skills in the above fashion are the clarity with which goals and expectations are set out for the student, the direct path to completion of a project, and acquisition of library research skills that the module provides. The students are impressed from the outset that the academic department takes seriously the commitment to train students in good research habits, and that fact is witnessed by the joint efforts and presentations in both library and classroom instruction.

For those departments which are overburdened within the confines of present course structure, the separate module provides a way to place in the classroom those faculty members who are capable and interested in the task. Though none of us enjoys grading 100 or more freshman term papers a year, there are some for whom the teaching of the method and material is a challenge, if not a pleasure. We should be providing ways to utilize teaching resources efficiently, and we should acknowledge the library as

a natural setting for experiences which can be provided by qualified librarians at many of our colleges and universities.

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NOTES

[1]Marilyn Schauer Samuels, "A Mini Course in the Research Paper," College English, 38, No. 2 (October, 1976), 189-193.

[2]The authors' project has been funded through an NEH grant for library resource development.

[3]The course has been taught as both an 8 week 1 credit module or a 16 week 1 credit course. The outline can be adapted to provide several weeks when students do not meet in class at all under the longer schedule.

[4]For example, the libraries at the University of Alabama, University of Texas, and University of Kentucky, in conjunction with the English faculties, have developed research handouts with library exercises designed to lead the student through the basic research steps to make the information gathering stages of the research paper assignment more productive and efficient. Graduate students provide the library tutoring and/or instruction. Other libraries at schools such as the University of Southern Colorado, the University of West Virginia, and the University of Michigan, are experimenting with a general workbook approach, similar to the one used in this module at UW-Parkside and first developed by Miriam Dudley at UCLA; however, these efforts do not extend beyond just teaching the use of reference sources.

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Appendix A

TWELVE

TERM PAPERS:

USING THE LIBRARY-LEARNING CENTER

Objective 1: The student will identify an appropriate encyclopedia for background information on his subject.
Objective 2: The student will identify appropriate subject headings for his topic in the card catalog.
Objective 3: The student will identify appropriate indexes to find information on his topic.
Objective 4: The student will identify, when appropriate, statistical sources relevant to his topic.

Now that you have been introduced to some of the types of materials available in the U.W.-Parkside Library-Learning Center and know how to use examples of each type, you are well on your way to being able to make effective use of the Library-Learning Center for writing a term paper. However, at this point you should become aware of the necessity for having a basic research plan which will aid you in taking full advantage of your new knowledge and skills.

After selecting a preliminary term paper topic, a research strategy should be developed. Generally this will include:

1) Using general sources, such as encyclopedias, or textbooks to define the topic and to point out other sources of information. The bibliographies in these sources are usually excellent starting points, for they provide a list of books and articles that are not only pertinent but also authoritative. The quality of the materials is especially important to research work on the college level. (See Chapter Three).
2) Locating all subject headings which might be used to cover books and media in the Library-Learning Center which pertain to the topic. The book Library of Congress Subject Headings is the best place to start. (See Chapter Five)
3) Checking the card catalog under the appropriate subject headings to determine the amount of material available and its location. Be sure to see if there are any bibliographies listed. These should be examined first. Also check the subject heading tracings for additional leads to material in the subject catalog. (See Chapter Four).
4) Locating periodical indexes which list useful articles on the topic. (See Chapter Six).
5) Using the Parkside Serials Print-Out to locate the periodicals that are available at Parkside. (See Chapter Six).
6) Locating essays on the topic by consulting Essay and General Literature Index. Remember you will need to check the card catalog to see if the library owns

ASSIGNMENT TWELVE

Term Papers: Using the Library

1. Write the topic of your term paper here. _____

_____

2. As you answer the following questions, you should be collecting a list of materials which you will use to write your term paper. Not all categories will be useful for every topic. If a category is not applicable to your topic, write "NA" in the space provided.

   a. For an overview of your topic, consult either a general encyclopedia or a specialized encyclopedia that might be relevant for your topic. List the encyclopedia that you used and the subject heading under which information is located in that encyclopedia. Use the index volume. (Be sure to turn back to Chapter Three if you need a review on encyclopedias.)

   b. Check the LC subject heading book (Chapter Five) and make a list of subject headings that will be useable in the U.W.-Parkside card catalog. Check each heading and indicate, yes or no, whether U.W.-Parkside has any materials listed under that heading (e.g., Indians of North America--yes).

   c. Locate any periodical indexes (Chapter Six) which are likely to list articles on your subject. Write their names here, list the subject headings under which you looked for information in each, and indicate whether U.W.-Parkside has any materials under those headings.

   d. Check Essay and General Literature Index to see if there are essays which you may not have located by using other sources. List the subject headings you used and indicate whether you found any material under each heading. (For a review of this source, check Chapter Ten.)

   e. Newspapers can be a valuable source of information on past as well as current events. If applicable to your topic (see Chapter Seven for a review), list the newspaper indexes you used and the subject headings which were useful in each. Indicate whether you found any articles under each heading used.

   f. For some papers, biographical information is necessary and can be obtained only by using specialized biographical books. If this is true for your subject, list the sources you used. (Check Chapter Eight.)

   g. If you need some statistical information in your paper, check the statistical sources listed in Chapter Eleven and indicate which sources were most useful.

   h. If by this time, you have not been able to acquire enough information to write your paper, please check with a reference librarian who may be able to suggest additional resource materials and show you how to use them.

Appendix B

REFERENCES AND SOURCES

Exercise A

1. Write a paragraph in which you support your point with two quotations from an authoritative source--a journal, general reference or other text. Use proper footnote format. Use the models suggested by your instructor.

2. The following is an example of one student's attempt to complete the assignment.
   - What information is incomplete?
   - Is the distinction between the student's ideas, and those of the reference, made clear in each example?
   - Could you go immediately to the source in each case, and find the exact same information, yourself? Why not?
   - Does the footnote follow the example of correct order, and punctuation, as provided by your models?

Synesthesia

Have you ever walked past a bakery and tasted the smells of freshly baked bread? This blending of the senses is called synesthesia.

Colored hearing is the most common form. Not all synesthetic people will see the same color for a given tone, although the different colors they do see will have the same brightness and depth. For instance, a high pitched tone will always give off a bright color, while a low tone gives off a dark color.

Synesthesia in itself is not common. Only a small handful of people are gifted with it.

Sensory blending is proof that some people really do see what you mean.

Lawrence and Marks, Synesthesia: The Lucky People with Mixed up Senses, Psychology Today, June 1975, p. 48.

3. Check your own paragraph.
   - Do you have a footnote for each quotation?
   - Do you have a page number for each reference?
   - Do you have a footnote each time you summarize, paraphrase, or otherwise consolidate information you have gathered?
   - If your information is summarized from several pages, can the reader tell exactly from which page each data point comes?
   - If not, have you checked to see if perhaps you have summarized too extensively?
   - How long is your direct quotation? Could it be summarized more briefly in your own words? Justify your decision to use direct quotation.

4. Re-write your paragragraph so that it complies with the guidelines you discuss with your instructor concerning correct form, accuracy, appropriateness, and validity of reference content.

Exercise B

Analyze the following three examples to determine the quality of references, and their level of appropriateness, sophistication, and timeliness in handling the subject matter. For instance, would you expect a research paper on childhood development and reading readiness to cite as its major source, an article in Reader's Digest? Why? Could you justify such a source as perhaps one of many used? Before answering the last question, what else would you need to know?

APPENDIX C

FROM NOTE CARDS TO TEXT:

(1) properly introduce your quoted or paraphrased material.

(2) verify the authority of your source in brief fashion (justify your choice)

(3) avoid blind quotations (quotations lacking above steps)

UNACCEPTABLE (blind quote):

If women have accepted the "passive roles and models offered to them by society, mirrored in art for centuries, how can we blame them that they are abused, misused, unrecognized."[4]

BETTER:

Even opponents of women's rights, such as Jane Doe, ← introduce

verify → long a columnist for Happy Homemaker and leader of the Sexy Lady" group, admits that if women have accepted the "passive roles and models offered to them by society. Mirrored in art for centuries, how can we blame them that they are abused, misused, and unrecognized."[4]

PRACTICE: Choose one of your sources, and write an introduction that would be appropriate to justify use of material from that source and author.